

**CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD**

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on Tuesday 19 October 2021.

**PRESENT:** Councillors C Hobson (Chair), A Hellaoui, T Higgins, Z Uddin, D Davison and L Garvey (Vice-Chair)

**PRESENT BY INVITATION:**

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:**

**OFFICERS:** S Blood, S Butcher, T Dunn, P Jemson, J Russell, C Snowball, D Fenny and S Lightwing

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Councillors C Wright, M Saunders, V Banks, R Brown, R Farnham, T Parkinson, P Rudd, R Scott, B Cooper and A Preston (The Mayor)

21/11 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Prior to the Apologies for Absence, the Chair welcomed the Members and officers to the Corporate Parenting Board to the meeting. The Chair shared a story regarding the importance of being a Corporate Parent and our duty to all children and especially children looked after.

21/12 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The following members declared an interest:

Councillor	Type of interest	Reason
A Hellaoui	Non Pecuniary	School Governor
T Higgins	Non Pecuniary	School Governor

21/13 **MINUTES- CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD - 14 SEPTEMBER 2021 AND ACTION PLAN**

21/14 **ADOPTION TEES VALLEY- ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21**

The Board welcome Vicky- Davison Boyd, Service Manager from Adoption Tees Valley (ATV) who was in attendance to provide the Adoption Tees Valley Annual report 2020-21.

This Annual Report covered the period of 1.4.20 - 31.3.2021.

The Board were well aware that this period had been impacted by Covid-19 and the Service Manager advised that the year reported on has been characterised by adoption activity which has been conducted within the amended regulations and restrictions that have been imposed because of the public health emergency. One aspect that the ATV used was the ability to move adoptive parents onto Stage 2 of the adoption process without the medicals/ DBS being returned due to delays. However the Board were assured that no adoptive parents were approved without a medical or a DBS. Medicals were carried out by doctors/ medical advisors be that virtually.

In the main, despite some members being absent, Adoption Panels were held (virtually) and no adopters were approved without being presented to Panel; to ensure the quality assurance mechanism set in place.

The Service Manager stated that ATV continued to work in partnership with all 5 local authorities; however initially at the beginning of April 2020, moves for children to adoption placements were put on hold due to the virus and its health implications.

ATV worked closely with the National Adoption Agency National system and quite quickly looked at safe measures to move children on if that had been matched and not to have further unnecessary delay unduly by the pandemic. ATV operated a national risk assessment system (taking into account all issues associated with the pandemic) and there was excellent work undertaken by social workers; children services staff etc and these have been proven by the outcomes of some of the work undertaken in the year.

In terms of children being adopted, in the Tees Valley there were 82 children placed for adoption, but there were a further 17 children have been placed for early permanence, not yet "placed for adoption".

In terms of Courts, they were very closely with ATV and heard adoption hearings, be that through challenging circumstances and there were 89 children adopted in the year.

#### Key developments

The Service Manager advised that ATV had devised the Early Permanence Strategy; which set out to offer more opportunity for children to be cared for by their likely permanent family, at an earlier stage in their lives. This has been achieved through fostering for adoption, where the child's plan is well developed before the Placement Order is granted, enabling a transparent, well planned placement, which reduces moves for children, and enables vital bonding and attachment with those likely to become parents to the child, at an earlier stage.

This was slightly affected by Covid, however this was put back on track and training was delivered to all 5 local authorities children's services. ATV met with senior Managers and legal teams and key teams. Due to this we are seeing more children being moved onto early permanence.

In the latter part of the year, ATV worked on their moving onto adoption model which is a national researched programme and have begun to pilot in ATV and used in specific cases. Foster carers and adopters get to know each other better and all the focus is supporting the child with continued foster carer contact even when placed.

In terms of Middlesbrough's performance, the Manager outlined that there had been some excellent work and one thing that was really embedded was the permanence monitoring group, which was tightly managed and this enabled a close track of all children with a permanence plan and particularly an adoption plan. The Permanence Monitoring group was chaired by Paula Jemson and attended my members of ATV and plans are done in a timely way and if there are any delays, these problems are resolved.

In terms of Middlesbrough's numbers for 2020-21, there were:

- 25 Children adopted (compared to 16 in 2019-20) and there are several sibling groups.
- This year, there have been 10 children adopted
- 24 placements
- Timescales for children being adopted has improved in Middlesbrough, it was

over 500 days from being looked after to moving in with adopters in 2019-20, but last year the average figure of 385 days.

- Increase in older children coming through for adoption

The Service Manager congratulated children's services for their performance, but advised further improvement could be made, however ATV work closely with Middlesbrough to ensure the service continues to improve; however there has been vast improvement in terms of adoption and early permanence.

In terms of training, ATV have been involved in the programme for social workers, and ATV have been thrilled by the number of newly qualified social workers coming through and being able to have in depth discussion.

Following the presentation, the Board congratulated the service for the number of children and especially older children being adopted.

A Board member queried whether there was any update regarding the number of diverse groups seeking to become adoptive parents. The Service Manager advised that ATV had reached out to recruit to diverse communities and there had been a small increase- 3 families were currently coming through assessment. In terms of children from ethnic minority backgrounds, there are several, and it was hoped that they would be able to be placed with ethnic minority families if suitable. The Board learnt that there was no one prevalent ethnic background as most children from tended to be dual heritage.

The Head of Looked After Children and Corporate Parenting further added that to date Middlesbrough had secured:

- 14 adoption orders , with a further 2 hopefully being granted an order.
- 32 children who are subject to adoption orders; with 2 children not looked to adoptors.

Of those 32 children:

- 7 single children
- 5 sibling groups of 2
- 5 from ethnic minorities
- 6 children with significant health and additional needs
- 7 children over the age of 4 years old.

The Director of Children's Services further wanted to stress that these improvements had been made during covid and social workers and the regional adoption agency has been working differently. Middlesbrough should be proud of the way it has performed during this period. She also outlined that she had the pleasure of being the adoption decision maker for Middlesbrough and was passionate about how our children find their forever home.

Lastly , the foster carer in attendance advised that historically, foster carers had little to do with the selection of foster carers and queried whether this could be developed. In terms of foster carer involvement, ATV have started to involve foster carers more in the meeting of prospective adopters, however the selection process was for social workers however should take into account feedback from foster carers; in terms of matching and selection and foster carers should have the opportunity to meet adopters and share stories or the child/ren. The Service Manager also outlined to the Board that it was National Adoption week and any support would be welcome.

The Chair thanked the service manager for her presentation and input.

AGREED- That the presentation be noted.

The Director of Children's Services provided a verbal update of Covid 19.

Schools were operating as business as usual, however there are still covid cases in some schools, however in the main they were managing; however the impact on covid on school staffing was variable.

In terms of children's social work, Middlesbrough has returned to working with children and young people as per pre covid, and there is significant work being undertaken to move social workers safely back into Middlesbrough House.

In terms of covid vaccines, the Head of Looked After Children and Corporate Parenting advised that there were 125 children who fitted the eligibility category and the programme was being led by the school immunisation team. Update was slow but it was being promoted. The Council had been working with the schools immunisation team and discussion had taken place with children, young people and foster carers to ensure all information was shared and that they could make an informed choice.

AGREED- That the update be noted.

## 21/16 **PARTICIPATION WITH OUR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

The Chair welcome Hannah Wiseman, Programme Manager- Specialist and Targeted from Participation People to the meeting.

At the last meeting of the Board, the Chief Executive provided the Board with an overview of the Participation Roadmap for Middlesbrough as well as working closely with the children in care council and care leavers forum.

At present, the focus was on Care leavers week and the Participation People with Care leavers were undertaking some training with elected members to provide information of what it was like to be a child in care. The training would be 1 hour. Workshops surrounding young people's wellbeing were also being developed and would run throughout November.

In terms of further work, the Participation People would work and consult with young people to see what they want in Middlesbrough and in the pipeline, was Middlesbrough Takeover to solve Middlesbrough's big business challenges.

Further updates would be delivered at every meeting of the Board.

AGREED- That the update be noted.

## 21/17 **CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD STRATEGY ACTION PLAN- REVIEW OF THE SUFFICIENCY ACTION PLAN**

The Chair welcomed the Specialist Commissioning & Procurement Senior Manager to the meeting to provide an overview of the highlight report of the Sufficiency action plan were was devised out the corporate Parenting Board Strategy.

The Sufficiency Action Plan will be reviewed and updated as actions are completed or as new work is identified in the event of any changes to our sufficiency needs over the 3-year cycle of our plan.

The Sufficiency action plan was broken up into 6 themed areas, with a key accountable officer who works closely with the Manager.

The Manager provided an overview of the key progress to date against each them and these are bulleted below:

### **Theme 1 - Strengthening Commissioning for Children and Young People**

- Work has commenced on the introduction of Controcc in to Children's in order to bring efficiencies in payment processes and strengthen our demand modelling already achieved in Adults.
- Middlesbrough Council held an Independent Fostering Agency Provider Event in June 2021 which was very well attended.

### **Theme 2 – Increasing Placements Close to where Children and Young People live and learn**

- Partner in Practice work was undertaken with in-house fostering and has been put on hold as a business case for internal change has been submitted for approval.
- Regional work on future procurement of a regional framework continues and the commissioning model has been received and circulated internally for review.
- Internal unregulated provision opened and is actively being used with 7 young people currently being supported.
- Rosecroft Children's Home has re-opened with an increase in beds to 5 and now specifically offering support to young people aged 16+ in order to support move on to independence.
- Continue to work with the region in order to identify any opportunities for collaboration. Currently awaiting set up of a regional commissioning hub.

### **Theme 3 – Growing Early Intervention & Prevention**

- PAUSE continues to provide monitoring information on the women engaged and the positive outcomes they are achieving, this has resulted in an extension to the current contract.
- Pilot Early Intervention and Prevention service has commenced and is being closely monitored. A formal review will be undertaken in order to ensure proof of concept and confirm future commissioning intentions.

### **Theme 4 – Improving Placements & Support for Care Leavers**

- Business case has been submitted in relation to increasing supported lodging providers internally and is awaiting sign off.

### **Theme 5 – Enhancing Learning Outcomes for Children & Young People**

- Work currently being undertaken with the Head of Virtual schools. Discussions have commenced with the Boarding School providers in order to expand the opportunities for our children and young people and increase placement choice.

### **Theme 6 – Building Our Fostering Capacity and Adoption Outcomes**

- Business case for internal change has been submitted for approval.

In terms of impact and performance, the Manager outlined that there had been opened engagement with the Independent Fostering market which was really positive and gave an opportunity to feedback and update them on our improvement journey and aspirations for the future. She also advised that external placement numbers have decreased and plateaued and the Council are now monitoring these weekly focusing on both internal and external placement changes.

In terms of next steps, the Manager advised that the following would be undertaken:

- Review and update the Sufficiency Action Plan to make sure its fit for purpose
- Unregulated provision changes needs to be added to plan
- A schedule for provider engagement to be developed to ensure networking with the market continues to develop
- Ensure the regional work meets the needs of Middlesbrough and where not continue to work independently
- Work with in-house fostering to understand the business plan for the future which in turn can identify our commissioning intentions moving forward
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Following the presentation, one of the care leavers in attendance advised that she was part of the foster carers' panel and they were currently doing some marketing to get more foster carers, and the Manager advised a meeting would be scheduled to pursue this further.

AGREED- That the action plan be noted.

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## **PERFORMANCE AGAINST CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY**

The Head of Looked after Children and Corporate Parenting was in attendance and provided the Board with information relating to the Corporate Parenting Board scorecard.

The Director advised that the scorecard was in place for the Corporate Parenting Board to see how our performance was progressing and have the opportunity to challenge anything where you saw wasn't meeting target.

The main points to note were as follows:

### Demand

- There has been an 22.6% reduction in overall numbers of children looked after since August 2020
- Since the height of **702** looked after children during September 2020, there has been a reduction of 159 looked after children.
- The rate of looked after children per 10,000 of the population has reduced from 166 in August 2021 to 165.1 in September and has reduced from 207 in the last year to 164.5 in the last year.
- This remains higher than our statistical neighbour where the rate of looked

after children per 10,000 is 125.5.

- 122 children and young people have ceased to be looked after in the last 6 months. 100 children have become looked after in the same period
- In October 2020 the data evidences that for every child ceasing to be looked after, 1.7 children started to become looked after. This means that more children were becoming looked after than ceasing and the looked after population continued to increase.
- There has been a month on month reduction in this throughout the year until March 2021 when improvements resulted in less children becoming looked after than those ceasing.
- This progress has continued. In June 2021 for every child ceasing to be looked after 0.6 children became looked after. This has remained static for the last 3 months.
- 55% of the workforce have between 15-20 children on their caseload.

### Permanency

#### **Special Guardianship Orders/ Child arrangement order (SGOs/CAO)**

- In the last 6 months 51 children have secured permanence through the making of a Special Guardianship Order or Child Arrangement Order.
- This has been achieved through increased management oversight within Legal Gateway Panel, Permanency Monitoring Group, an investment in a commissioned service and a drive on performance management.
- In July 2020 there was a height of 212 children cared for by family or friends in connected carer placements. This has reduced through improvement work to support children to achieve permanence. In August 2021 this reduced to 129 children. (39.1% reduction).

#### **Placements with Parents**

- In the most recent forecasting model demonstrates a reduction in the number of children subject to care proceedings and placed with a parent.
- In September 2020 there were 99 children living at home and subject to a Care Order. This has reduced to 58 children in September 2021. This is 41.4% reduction.

#### **Adoption**

- There is a 56% increase of number of adoption orders in the year 20/21 (25) compared to 2019/2020 (16).
- In this year to date 14 Adoption Orders have been secured. There are currently a further 32 children progressing to adoption with Placement Orders. Only 2 children are not linked to adopters
- The local authority is on track to increase the number of children subject to adoption orders significantly in this financial year.
- The 20/21 adoption score card evidences that the in the 12 months leading up to 31 March 2021 the average number of days between Placement Orders

and Adoption Order has reduced to 189 days. The 3 year average is 323 days.

## **Placements**

- The Head of Services advised that whilst the graph showed an increase in the number of children placed outside a 20 mile radius of Middlesbrough since July an analysis of this data shows that the majority of the children impacted have moved to either adoptive placements, placements with family or in house carers.
- In September the data shows there has been a reduction in the percentage of children paced outside of 20 miles of Middlesbrough. This has increased by 2% improvement since August and sits at 76%.
- 10 children have been placed outside of Middlesbrough in September 2021.
- Positively, of the 10 children that moved to an out of area placement in September 2021 – 1 child was placed in their adoptive placement, 2 children placed with family in connected carers arrangements, 5 children were placed in foster care – of which 3 placements were in house foster placements and 1 in an external residential placement. The YP that moved to a residential placement moved from Gleneagles to a more appropriate long term setting.
- There are currently 17 care leavers residing with former foster carers.

## **Placement stability**

- At the end of September 2021 – 33 children looked after by Middlesbrough had experience 3 or more placement moves in the last 12 months. (6% of the cla population).
- Positively this has reduced from 39 in August 2021. This has reduced from 128 in the same period last year.
- Graph 2 demonstrates that 4.2% of the full looked after population have experienced a placement breakdown in the last 12 month. For the first time in 12 months this has fallen below the target.

## **IRPs**

There has been a 30% reduction in the number of IRPs in the last 6 months compared to the previous 6 month period. 89% of IRPs in September were resolved in stage 1 or 2.

## **EET/NEET**

The second graph reported showed a small increase in the number of children in care post 16 in employment, education or training (EET). 77% of 16+ are EET in September 2021.

Of the 180 care experienced young people - 47% of the care leaving population being engaged in either full or part time education training and employment and 53% not in Education, employment to training (NEET), however work will be underway to



address some of the barriers.

Of the 93 young people that are NEET:

- 1 YP NEET due to illness or disability
- 3 YP NEET due to pregnancy or parenting
- 27 YP NEET and available for work
- 10 are NEET due to caring responsibilities
- 5 YP are NEET due to being in custody (education status to be rechecked)
- 26 YP are NEET due to emotional or mental health difficulties
- 1 YP is NEET due to religious traditions
- 4 YP are NEET due to substance misuse
- 16 YP are NEET due to other circumstances

Finally the Head of Service outlined some of the impacts:

### **Visits**

93% of looked after children have been seen within the last 6 weeks; this is a 1% increase from last month. This has been consistently high at over 90% since May. This has increased from 88% in the same period last year however has remained consistently high and Performance clinics and compliance is well embedded

### **Supervision/Management Oversight**

94% of looked after children have had a supervision within the month of September and this was a 2% increase from last month. This has been consistently high at over 90% since May.

### **Personal Education Plans**

Performance in relation to PEPs remains high at 100%. This is performance for all children in the last 12 month period. Good practice warrants an update PEP each 6 months. Performance remains high with this indicator also. This performance has remained consistently high.

For clarification, all looked after children have an updated PEP every term and there are in place to constantly review their education/ their needs/ consider their transitions and they are a legal requirement and continue post 16 into adulthood.

The targets are devised are led by schools and will work with the child/ social worker and carer where the special attention are. These are reviewed at a meeting every term. These will also look at enrichment and any emotional wellbeing. External quality of PEPs were also deemed good.

### **Health Assessments**

91% of looked after children have had a recorded health check within the last 12 months. This does not take in to account those older children who have refused a medical assessment. This has been a 1% increase since August 2021.

The Head of Service was thanked for her presentation.

AGREED- That the presentation be noted.

## 21/19 VIRTUAL SCHOOL TRANSITIONS 2021

The Head of Access to Education presented the virtual schools transitions 2021 report to the Board. As way of introduction, the Board were made aware that the Virtual schools governing body had asked the Head of Virtual Schools to provide some clarity regarding key transitions in the education of children looked after e.g. significant point where a child is moving from education setting to the next and these are points in a child's live if the support isn't right, that learning and progress can be put back.

All children looked after have a personal education plan (PEP) and the PEO process supports pupils at transition points throughout their school journey; this includes transition into care, emergency moves and natural transitions such as starting reception, moving to secondary school or post 16 education.

The routines and processes in place that support all transitions must be flexible to ensure the needs of individual children are met. Where possible children will need time to become familiar with their new surroundings, at their own pace and with support from their key person. Planning should start 12 months preceding any natural transition point and then be a continuous and evolving process that can be adapted to meet the needs of the individual child. Many activities such as joint meetings between settings and school staff can be on-going throughout the year.

In terms of support, the Officer outlined the following in terms of the following transitions:

### **EYFS**

Children aged 2+ who attend an educational provision are required to have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) which records both care planning information as well as educational next steps to ensure appropriate progress is made. Normally, this transition is quite straightforward, by there are exceptions.

Last year;

- 28 children transitioned from nursery to reception
- 6 of those children are now in their forever homes and are no longer looked after
- 3 children had SEN support needs and 0 had an EHCP
- 9 children started reception in schools outside of Middlesbrough

### **Primary to Secondary**

The transition to secondary school is a huge step for all children and especially big step for children who are looked after. When a child moves to secondary school they no longer remain in one class all day, but are required to move around the school. Children have to deal with timetables and a wide variety of subjects.

Some common transitional problems for children are as follows:

1. When leaving primary school children go from being the oldest to the youngest in their new school.
2. From having one teacher in primary school children will have to cope with as many as ten or more teachers with different teaching styles and personalities.
3. Secondary school is much bigger and children will go from having one classroom to ten or more.
4. There is more homework to be done.
5. A larger number of textbooks need to be transported and organised.
6. A longer school day.

7. Greater competition both academically and in sports and activities.
8. Faster pace of teaching
9. Having to make new friends – this is especially difficult if a child's primary school friends have not moved to the same secondary school.

In order to support year 6 transition all looked after children received £1,000 Pupil Premium Plus to ensure enhanced and bespoke transition arrangements were in place.

Last year:

- 43 children transitioned from primary to secondary
- 7 of those children are now in their forever homes and are no longer looked after
- 12 children had SEN support needs and 10 had an EHCP
- 23 children started secondary in schools outside of Middlesbrough

## Post 16

Young people left school on the last Friday in June. All young people of school leaving age needed to do one of the following:

- stay in full-time education, for example at school, sixth form college or further education college
- start an apprenticeship or traineeship
- spend 20 hours or more a week working or volunteering while also doing part-time education or training

The local authority has a duty to make sure young people are offered a suitable place by the end of September. This is known as the September Guarantee.

Care leavers are eligible for the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund which can help with things like books, travel and equipment.

Last year;

- 47 children transitioned from secondary to post 16
- 2 of those children are now in their forever homes and are no longer looked after
- 15 children had SEN support needs and 13 had an EHCP
- 38 had an offer of full time education and the other 9 had a training place offer.

September 2021 Education, employment and training figures:

NEET	23%
Education	66%
Employment	6%
Training	5%

Finally the Board were shown some diagrams which outlined the planning process for a child looked after to ensure transition goes as smoothly as possible. E.g. EYFS planning will begin 2 years in advance of a child starting school.

The Chair thanked the officer for his presentation.

AGREED- That the presentation be noted.

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**ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED.**

## Care Leavers Week 2021

The Chair reminded the Board that Care Leavers week would run from 25- 29

19 October 2021

October 2021 as part of this, there would be training to the Board from Middlesbrough Care leavers.

### Fostering and Adoption

The Chair finally addressed residents of the Town, expressing if they required any information regarding fostering or adoption to get in touch with Middlesbrough Council.